DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 719 PS 009 874

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TITLE Research Policy Relating to Infant Care.
PUB DATE Dec 76
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role; Early Childhood; Family Life; *Federal Programs; *Government Role; *Infants; Information Dissemination; Information Networks; Interagency Coordination; *Policy Formation; *Research Coordinating Units; *Research Needs; Research Utilization; Social Change
IDENTIFIERS Office of Child Development

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current research policies concerned with infant care and discusses these policies within the context of policies affecting the broader areas of family life and society as a whole. The paper discusses the role of the federal government in the lives of families in this country and presents a list of family-oriented goals which the government could use in formulating policies in this area. It is suggested that research policies should reflect broad social changes affecting families and children, such as changes in women's status and in work patterns within the family. The paper describes the development of an Interagency Panel on Early Childhood Research and Development which was organized by the federal government to provide a centralized mechanism for coordinating research policies and for disseminating research findings concerned with the development and care of young children. Also described is the role of the Office of Child Development (OCD) in developing and sustaining national policies and research relating to children and families. (BD)

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ED153719

Research Policy Relating to Infant Care

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Summary

Research policies relating to infant care are in a part-whole relationship with family policies, which in turn, are in a part-whole relationship with broader social policies. The research policies are to some extent shaped and limited by these larger policy areas.

Federal agencies primarily responsible for the support of research on infants and for the development of research policies, have organized a Panel to address research policy issues such as identification of research priorities, increasing coordination of research planning, providing information useful to policy makers, and providing guidelines to increase comparability of research findings.

One Federal agency, the Office of Child Development, has developed a long-range goal on the family which permits the addressing of research policies relating to infant care. These policies lead to examining the impact of infant care programs, the information needs of parents and caregivers, and the services which best meet the needs of families. The values and traditions of the society and the family will continue to influence both the substance of the research and the utilization of the findings for broader social policies.

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Research policy relating to infant care is made up of many policies deriving from many concerns of the nation. These concerns are broad and complex and must be examined carefully to understand the role and substance of research policies relating to infant care. The concerns include contexts within which research policies operate; i.e., the family context and the broader social context. The concerns include the role of the government in intervention in infant care, family functioning and social policies. They include the monitoring of critical social changes. They include the status, purpose, and directions of research. They include the process by which research policies in infant care are made. They include assessment of impact of policies and programs relating to infant care. They include actions needed to assure the well-being of infants, their families, society, if the quality of life is to improve. Each of these concerns is discussed as it has meaning for research policies relating to infant care.

Contexts of Research Policies

Consistent with an ecological perspective of society, research policies relating to infant care are viewed in a part-whole relationship with family policies; while family policies, in turn, are viewed in a part-whole relationship with broader social policies. Starting with the broader social policies, a series of questions might be asked about the relationship of these

policies with family policies and research policies relating to infant care. What is the relationship to families of social policies concerning taxation, housing, welfare, and transportation? What is the relationship to infants of family policies concerning the locus of primary responsibility for the care and rearing of infants, access to child care of high quality, and parent participation in child care programs? What is the relationship to infant care of research policies concerning agency goals, research priorities, cumulativeness of knowledge and indicators on the status of children? These relationships are recognized throughout the presentation but particularly the relationship between research policies relating to infants and family policies.

Government Role

The role of the government in intervention in infant care, family functioning and social policies, is continuously questioned and challenged. The questions are about the extent of such intervention and the challenge is to provide services without jeopardizing family and infant rights. Two organizations, funded by the Office of Child Development, recently completed studies on the role of the government in family policies as they affect infants and young children. Both organizations confronted the issue of the role of the government in family life.

One organization is the Education Commission of the States, a national group based and Denver, Colorado, and made up of State governors, State legislators, chief, State school officers, and others concerned with children. The other organization is the National Academy of Sciences, a semi-governmental group of distinguished scientists and based in Washington, D.C. The Education Commission of the States focused the issue of government involvement in family

policies affecting infants in this way:

> American praise for the institution of the family has long been accompanied by a hands-off policy. Attempts to support and guide the directions of family efforts in child-rearing can quickly raise fears for the sanctity of the family. Some persons and groups feel such efforts to be an intrusion into private life . . . Others fear the undermining of their cultural traditions and mores . . . Any program of aid to families must therefore clearly demonstrate its aim as support to parents in achieving more effectively their own goals for their children. (pp. 1-2)

The National Academy of Sciences identified the issue of government involvement in the following questions:

> How can we improve services to those in need without infringing on individual initiative, rights and freedoms? How do we solve problems that have multiple causes and multiple consequences in a society that places high values on pluralism, local initiative, and a high degree of specialization? What rational means can be found to establish priorities for government interventions in a world of scarce resources and competing claims on them? (p. viii)

The respect for individual and group rights, the respect for the privacy of the family, sets some real limitations to government intervention. The limitations of this intervention or involvement with families are clearly stated by the National Academy of Sciences. The involvement is seen to consist of the following:

a. employment, tax, and cash benefit policies that assure each child's family an adequate income. The economic support structure should provide that one (or the only) parent can remain in direct and full-time care of a child under 6 without being deprived of the income level consistent with identified standards.

b. a broad and carefully integrated system of support services for families and children - health care, child care, special services.

c. planning and coordination mechanisms to ensure adequate coverage and access of families to the full range of available services - service delivery systems. (pp. 4-5)

The limitations of government involvement and the concern for the family, suggest a number of family related goals which the government may try to achieve in order to increase the well-being of families and improve their quality of life. These family related goals are summarized as follows:

a. to provide services to families and children to increase cohesiveness of the family and to encourage its independence in its child-rearing capacity.

b. to ensure that alternative care arrangements meet minimum federal and state standards based on research findings of the effects of day time care and on experience in the administration of such programs. These standards include continuity of care, a high ratio of adults to children, cleanliness and nutritional adequacy, safety, health services and a stimulating environment.

c. to make it possible for parents to become more involved in the lives of their children.

d. to help parents understand the process of child growth and development.

e. to provide assistance that will increase the possibility of the family staying together rather than being separated.

f. to utilize the strengths of different cultural and ethnic values and different family forms.

The government should develop family and social policies leading to the achievement of these goals.

Monitoring of Social Changes

The conditions of society change, sometimes dramatically and radically, sometimes slowly. Many of these changes, however, are affecting the family as the basic social institution and need to be monitored to determine what new policies are necessary to assure the well-being of the family. The social changes most directly affecting the family, and particularly families with infants, concern broad social changes, changes in the status of women

and their work role, and changes in the family structure itself. These changes, because of their importance to families and infants, require continued monitoring. The changes are:

1. large increases in the proportion of women who work, both full and part time.

   a. increased numbers with children under 6
   b. increased numbers with children under 3

2. growing numbers of children living in families headed by women

   a. higher divorce ratios
   b. higher rates of births out of wedlock

3. attitudes of women regarding their role in society

   a. right to work
   b. right to child care
   c. equality

4. expansion and increasing specialization of the human service occupations

5. continued long-term trends toward urbanization and suburbanization

6. greater availability and use of a growing number of birth control techniques as well as a decline in birth rates

These changes not only must be monitored in terms of their effects on family well-being, but they also must be monitored to identify new issues for policy formulation and new areas for research policy. Focusing on research policies relating to infant care, the new work patterns suggest a number of issues that have meaning for both monitoring and research policies. These issues are:

1. What are the effects on the child of the absence of either its mother or father or both for substantial periods of time during the child's first 3 years of life?

2. What are the effects on the child with only one parent and when that parent works?

3. From what perspective is child care perceived when both parents work?

   a. the needs of the child?
   b. the needs of the mother?
   c. the needs of the entire family?

4. Who is responsible for providing child care when the right to work is exercised?

   a. the parents (with or without tax benefits)?
   b. the working mother (with or without tax benefits)?
   c. the government?
   d. the employer?
   e. combination of family, government, employer?

5. What are the economic costs of increased numbers of parents in the labor force?

   a. what are the costs for child care as compared to paying one adult to stay home?

   b. what are the costs of care of sick of disabled adults in a family, as well as children, when the caregiver joins the labor force as compared to paying one adult to stay home?

6. What new demands on family life occur when both parents work?

   a. changes in male and female roles in the home
   b. selection of child care services consistent with family needs and values
   c. assuring continuity of child rearing practices between the care giving facility and the home
   d. participating in various aspects of the child care service

      (1) policy
      (2) selection of staff
      (3) various contributions of time or materials
      (4) conferences with caregivers

7. What is the impact of working parents and child care on child development?

   a. children of different ages
   b. children in different programs

      (1) different contents of programs
      (2) different time lengths in child care facility

These issues, in many ways, provide a basis for developing research policies relating to infant care. Such policies, however, are not developed directly from the identified issues. Rather, they are developed by a series of related or supporting policies which help shape the substance of the research policies. These related and supporting policies involve the concerns of Federal agencies supporting research on infants and young children. The concerns include socially relevant research, the limitations of research knowledge and information, the limited amount of coordination of planning and support, and the identification of research priorities.

Research Concerns of Federal Agencies

There is an increasing concern on the part of the Federal agencies that research efforts must have more meaning within various social contexts critical to the well-being of the nation and its citizens. This increasing concern does not mean the abolishing of support of researchers who are primarily generating knowledge within a given discipline. It means, rather, that research has other functions, among which are the need to conduct research to resolve social problems, to clarify social problems or to provide policy relevant data.

But the effectiveness of research policies addressing social needs is curtailed by the status of knowledge, the status of methodology, the status of measurement and the status of application of disparate data to program development. These limitations are further conpounded by different sources of funding, different substantive disciplines and an enormous freedom for independent research prevalent in the nation. Not only are there recognized needs in research design, measurement, and substance, but there are needs to provide some mechanism to address these issues comprehensively. How can

there be meaningful research policies on families and infant care when there is no grasp of the larger research picture?

The Federal Agencies Response

The agencies of the Federal government, the major supporters of research in the nation, recognized the scope of the problems and organized an effort in 1970 to address the problems through the formation of an Interagency Panel on Early Childhood Research and Development. This Panel includes as members, the 27 Federal agencies concerned with early childhood research and development. Its mission is to increase interagency coordination of research planning and support. To achieve this mission, it has engaged in a number of activities relevant to research policies. It holds monthly meetings to discuss ways to solve research problems such as duplication of effort, critical gaps in knowledge, research design, measurements, etc., cumulativeness of knowledge, cross-research analysis, and just the basic problem of making available information on what the agencies are funding in research on children.

To begin to solve the problem of information on what is being funded, the Panel developed an Information System which contains abstracts of all on-going Federally funded research on children. The abstracts provide information on methodology, measures, and sample population characteristics. The Information System also includes findings of the projects, both interim and final. Analyses of these abstracts permit for the identification of research gaps, trends in research, and needs for changes in research policies. The Information System also contains, as a critical adjunct to research information, statistical data from various sources describing the conditions of children. These data are analyzed to determine the extent and characteristics of adverse conditions which identify those at developmental risk, and conditions

that need further study.

To begin to solve the problem of the cumulativeness of knowledge, a problem identified when cross project analyses were conducted, the Panel recommended to the Federal agencies that they adopt a set of guidelines to make cross-research analysis and cumulative knowledge more likely. The recommendations were these:

A. The researcher will provide complete definitions and/or descriptions of the variables which are part of the study;

B. The researcher will describe fully the groups being studied to determine the representativeness of the sample, using the following characteristics for reporting samples:

Samples of children

1. Number in sample
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Race
5. Grade
6. Family Income
7. Parental occupation
8. Parental education
9. Social class
10. Social class scale
11. Neighborhood
12. Language dialect
13. Ethnicity

Sample of pupils (when appropriate)

14. School (or institution)
15. Standardized-group test score (name and date)
16. Range of scores
17. Standard deviation

Sample as a sample

18. Size of total pool
19. How school(s) was selected
20. How class(es) were selected
21. How individual child was selected

C. The researcher will include in the review of the literature, evidence of how the selected methodology, instrumentation, and definitions and/or descriptions will allow comparisons with prior and/or current work in the field.

To begin to solve the problem of finding ways to increase interagency coordination for research planning and funding, the Panel selected a theme to provide an organizing concept. It chose the family. The Panel developed a statement, The Family: Research Considerations and Concerns, in which was summarized the Panel's interest in improving research on the family and identified research areas and questions which the member agencies could address either as separate agencies or in coordination with each other. In the Spring of 1974, the Panel sponsored a Conference on Family Research to which were invited key researchers on the family from across the country. These guests were provided with the background statement on the family. The Conference participants used the statement as a working document, reacted, modified, and recommended other research areas and questions. The concepts of ecology, the internal systems of the family, the family and transactions with external systems, were highlighted. The Panel also provided, in the background statement, recommendations for methodological needs. These were adopted by the Conference participants and were seen as pervasive for research on the family. Here are the concerns and suggestions:

1. Studies should be organized and designed to provide for analysis and reanalysis across studies over time.

2. Longitudinal studies are especially appropriate as a method for family research.

3. New and improved instrumentation and methodology are needed to cope more effectively with variables and factors, such as:

   a. socioeconomic status, but conceptualized as going beyond the traditional income, education, assistance, etc., and reflecting current social perceptions and conditions;

   b. family roles with regard to parent/child, parent/parent, parent/society, child/society, and family/society interactions;

   c. ethnicity or cultural identity;

   d. social forces and intervention procedures.

4. Theories of family models should focus more on "healthy" families than on the traditional pathological family models.

5. Research on the family should include methods for the dissemination and utilization of the findings.

This kind of interagency activity influenced the agencies to conduct more research on the family and to engage in research planning with the interests and concerns of other agencies in mind. They also used the Information System and the Guidelines on comparability to help them both for planning and for announcing research priorities to the research community.

Research Policy for OCD

The Office of Child Development is one agency that made family research a high priority. This priority began in 1974 and has led increasingly toward the development of family policies. Evidence of this new emphasis is provided in the 1976 long-range goal on child and family development. The goal statement is as follows:

> To better rationalize Federal and non-governmental service and benefit systems aimed at improving child and family development (within projected Federal expenditures for children) by:
>
> -developing national policy on child and family development, including determination of factors which best promote such

development, selection of appropriate measures, and evaluation of alternative intervention strategies.

An important aspect of developing a national policy on child and family development is the information base describing the conditions of children and their families at any given time as well as over time. This information base, as was stated before, is a part of the Information System of the Early Childhood Panel. OCD, recognizing the importance of this information and also primarily responsible for the support of the Panel's Information System, has as a second part of its long-range goal on the family the following:

> -establishing an information capability to maintain a systematic process for determining and reporting on the status of children and of services to children, and for conducting target group analyses to define the most appropriate relationships between various programs and services.

One form the achievement of the second part of the long-range goal has taken, is the development of a set of indicators of conditions. Rather than using the path of social indicators, which relies heavily on factor analysis and demographic data, OCD has supported the development of a system of using normative indices of health and education risk, considering these to be salient dimensions of developmental risk. The correlations of these data with developmental risk are higher than using the surrogate variable of family income, for example. From this kind of information, a match may be made with social services to determine their impact, their appropriateness, as well as to identify new services needed. The information also may be analyzed in relationship to research to determine what conditions of children and their families need further research.

The long-range goal of OCD, with its two parts of family policies and information on the status of children and their families, is achieved through a set of research policies. These research policies, and particularly those relating to infant care, are within the family policies, or, as was stated earlier, are in a part-whole relationship with family policies. The research policies relating to infant care are also shaped by the limits imposed on research. Let me summarize the separate policies discussed in this paper which affect research policies relating to infant care.

1. Policies incorporating the values of the society are as follows:

   a. pluralistic society
   b. privacy of family
   c. government provides services which support the family
   d. parent-participation in programs
   e. a variety of programs are accessible

2. Policies relating to the role of research are as follows:

   a. clarify social problems
   b. solve social problems
   c. provide policy relevant data

3. Policies relating to the role of Federal agencies in research are these:

   a. increase comparability and cumulativeness of knowledge
   b. increase coordination of research planning and support
   c. fill knowledge gaps
   d. develop programs
   e. assess impact of programs on families
   f. assess status of children and families

OCD and Infant Care

The OCD research policies relating to infant care are certainly shaped by the various policies just summarized. And these research policies are further shaped by the OCD long-range goal of formulating national policies in child and family development. In fact, research policies on infant care are perceived by OCD to be part of the national family policies. This emphasis on the family permeates the OCD research policies in infant care.

Other Federal agencies, it should be noted, have research policies relating to infant care, but they focus on special problems, such as handicapping conditions, or on basic research or on service delivery systems. OCD is primarily responsible for developing research policies in infant care incorporating social and family policies. Here are research policies and some of the activities carrying out the policies.

Policy 1. To support families in the rearing of infants and young children.

Research Activities
- a. research on family needs for child rearing
- b. research on family/institution interface to enhance child-rearing
- c. development of curricula and training materials to enhance child rearing
- d. demonstrating ways to help parents in child rearing through parent-child centers, parent involvement programs, etc.
- e. disseminating effective programs

Policy 2. To provide services to families with infants where the parents are unable to be with them continuously

Research Activities
- a. research on impact of substitute care on infants and families
- b. research on the desired quality of substitute care - staff/child ratio, comprehensive programs, parent involvement
- c. research on supply and demand needs for substitute care
- d. research on match between services and family differences
- e. demonstration of effective programs
- f. dissemination of effective programs

Policy 3. To enhance child and family development over time

Research Activities
- a. research on continuity of development
- b. research on critical intervention times and sequence
- c. research on prediction and prevention of developmental problems

Policy 4. To investigate and report on conditions of infants and their families

Research Activities
- a. monitor and assess the impact of policies and programs on infants and their families
- b. analyze regularly, information on the status of infants and their families
- c. recommend to the government new research policies critical to the well-being and quality of life of infants and their families.

This is one agency's research policies relating to infant care. It is not exhaustive, but is sufficiently representative to illustrate how research policies relate to other policies and are shaped by them. The research policies do not attempt to present a position on infant care: Should or should not the government make universal infant care available; Should or should not the government increase its intervention in family life? Rather, the research policies lead to examining the impact of infant care programs, the information needs of parents and caregivers, and the services which best meet the needs of families. To the extent that research findings provide answers, these will influence decisions on expansion of services. However, the values and traditions of the society and the family will continue to influence those larger policy decisions.

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